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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: PREL PHUM PTER PINR MASS MOPS EG KWBG IS
SUBJECT: SENIOR U.S. AND ISRAELI OFFICIALS DISCUSS EFFORTS
TO COMBAT ARMS SMUGGLING

REF: TEL AVIV 00391

Classified By: Ambassador James B. Cunningham; reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. Stephen Mull from the Office of the Under Secretary for International Security Affairs and his delegation met with senior Israeli MFA officials on February 6 to discuss meetings held earlier in the week in Copenhagen that focused on ways to counter the smuggling of weapons primarily intended for the Gaza Strip. Mull briefed the Israelis on the points agreed to in Denmark and laid out European concerns about expanding military operations against smuggling without a new UN Security Council resolution. The Israelis were reluctant to involve the UN, and each side agreed that international forces could use existing authorities to make progress in halting arms smuggling. The Israelis noted that Egypt had been doing more as of late and that the ultimate success of these efforts would come down to whether Egypt would exercise the political will to shut down smuggling operations. Mull said that participants in the Copenhagen meetings could move forward utilizing existing tools and authorities while working toward a more robust arrangement. He assured the Israelis that the U.S. would consult with them before engaging the Europeans, but advised that Israel conduct bilateral talks with the Europeans. End Summary.

¶2. (U) MFA participants included Senior Deputy Director General Yossi Gal, Policy Adviser Tal Becker, and Deputy Directors General Yacov Hadas (Middle East), Baruch Bina (North America), Alon Bar (Strategic Affairs), and Rafi Barak (European Affairs). Ambassador Mull was accompanied by the Ambassador, OSD's Mike Dumont, NEA/RA Director Michael Adler, PM officer Constantinos Nicolaidis, PolCouns, and Poloff.

PRINCIPLES AGREED TO IN COPENHAGEN

¶3. (S) Ambassador Mull began by summarizing the discussions that took place in Copenhagen earlier in the week and thanking the Israelis for their contributions to the conference. He explained that while implementing the U.S.-GOI anti-smuggling Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) would require enhancing interdiction efforts on the land border between Egypt and Gaza, his work focuses on creating a set of options that would help halt arms smuggling before it reaches that point. One example he provided was exploring with countries participating in Operation Active Endeavor whether they are interested in also taking on a counter-smuggling role. Mull then laid out the seven items that the participants in Copenhagen had agreed upon. They

included:

- Arms smuggling into Gaza is a threat to regional peace and security;
- Actionable intelligence should be shared as appropriate;
- There should be coordinated diplomatic efforts, though these would not necessarily involve the participation of all;
- Participating states would consider drawing on existing assets in the region and examine authorities to do so. Not all countries would participate in military operations;
- There should be agreed principles for action, to be discussed at the next meeting in London;
- Participants should meet regularly to review progress and plan further implementation; and,
- Participation in the initiative should be open to those who wish to join.

SOME EUROPEANS EXPRESS CONCERN

¶4. (S) Mull touched on European reactions at the Copenhagen conference, which were difficult to gauge because some countries, views changed over time and there were divisions within some delegations. The French, for example, had said that they wanted something along the lines of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), together with a statement of principles, but they later changed their minds. He noted that, in general, Europeans were nervous about the legal authority for expanding operations, with some preferring to have a new UNSCR. The Germans, along with the Spanish and Norwegians, stressed that they were solidly

behind the effort but wanted to rely on diplomatic rather than military efforts. Remaining participants were comfortable with an expanded military option given appropriate legal authority, according to Mull. Becker expressed Israeli reluctance to consider new UNSCR, but suggested that a very general resolution modeled along the lines of UNSCR 1540 could work if it left Israel with the freedom to take action when necessary. Bar added that European powers needed to focus on what they can do rather than what they cannot do, and that the smuggling problem, if not addressed, could lead to regional hostilities.

¶5. (S) Bar, who was in Copenhagen during the meetings, also expressed concern about European efforts there to exclude any references to HAMAS or Iran. Becker took up this theme as well and asked, "If Europeans are afraid to mutter Iran and HAMAS, can they be expected to really deal with smuggling?" Mull tried to reassure the Israelis that European reluctance to mention Iran and HAMAS did not change anything strategically. He advised that the Europeans did not want to be seen as blockading Gaza or targeting one country in their efforts put a halt to smuggling. Bar responded that, nevertheless, the efforts had to focus on Iran.

EGYPT AS THE KEY PLAYER

¶6. (S) Bar noted that in the end Egyptian political will would be the most important factor determining the success of countering smuggling efforts, with international actors complementing Cairo's work. Becker said that the MOU signed between the US and Israel in January, along with the meetings in Copenhagen, had been helpful catalysts that prodded Egypt to act more urgently against smuggling. Hadas added that Cairo seems much more committed to fighting smuggling, though it was primarily because it suited their political interests. He warned that interested parties could not be seen as dictating to or patronizing the Egyptians, and Bar stressed that Israel was careful in Copenhagen to avoid being seen as pressing Egypt.

MOVING FORWARD

¶ 7. (S) Mull said that even without another UNSCR countries have the authority and mechanisms to act in ways that go beyond what is being done now. He suggested, for example, that parties could board and inspect -- though not seize -- ships and could then go to the country in which the ship is flagged to request that it further inspect the cargo. "We have a framework in place that we should use when needed and we will hold our European partners to their commitments," he said. Bar agreed and said that using existing tools (e.g. counterterrorism treaties, UNSCRs) would afford greater flexibility and allow the parties to see which methods work best before institutionalizing anything, though he advised against working through the UN. Becker, for his part, thought that the quickest way to have a significant impact would be to create something modeled on the PSI.

¶ 8. (S) Gal asked if any of the work would focus on providing economic incentives to counter smuggling. Mull advised that economic assistance was not among the actions his group was working on, but he understood that some assistance was being planned for Bedouin tribes in the Sinai. Hadas said it was not only the Bedouins in the Sinai who were facilitating the smuggling; it was also groups in Libya and Sudan. Mull responded that the first task would be to soothe any Egyptian irritation over the meeting in Copenhagen and then engage Cairo on what they can do with regard to these "transit" states. Mull added that the U.S. would brief the Saudis, Yemenis, Jordanians, and possibly the Omanis on this issue. When asked by Gal what would happen between now and the next counter-smuggling meeting in London in March, Mull replied that the U.S. would consult with Israel to agree upon shared goals before engaging with Europe. He suggested to his Israeli interlocutors that they conduct bilateral talks with the European counterparts on this issue.

¶ 9. (U) Ambassador Mull has cleared this cable.

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